The Collective

Issue #1
June 2025

clive just been moved to tears

by *george costanza is a beautiful transsexual woman*, a zine about exactly what it's called, elbow-to-elbow with my fellow visitors at the reading table. This cramped upstairs room of the Tranzac Club is the Toronto Zine Library, whose bookshelf is hosting donated, free-to-read trans literature for May and June as **Trans Library Toronto (TLT).**

I follow along as McKenna Gray re-shelves the collection, typically alphabetized but now woefully cluttered after guests excitedly picked out and put back their selections in the mere two hours the library's been open. Shoved into the shelves is a utopic commune in a world of its own. Recognizable lit—Torrey Peters, Susan Stryker and Imogen Binnie—room in tight quarters with small-press and self-bound novels. Fanzines and DIY healthcare advice booklets, stacked in the library's little 'ZINES' bin, boast riso, hand drawn and Xeroxed typography. I've been flipping through a *Transgender Studies Quarterly* issue, the bound compilation of the online papers I've cited for all my university gender studies essays, thumbing the pen-scrawled annotations Gray had written in the margins on his first read years ago. Seeing so much trans-made print media packed into one place makes me wonder how *all* these writers got ahold of their printing presses—and how I haven't heard of them until now.

In his working hours, Gray curates contemporary art and archives exhibitions on gender, eroticism and power. After appearing on *CBC* and *Global News* as TLT's librarian, he's now a casual ambassador of trans literature. In news copy, he's quietly battling Conservative politicians' incoming 2SLGBTQ+ book bans. In layman's terms, he collects and manages Toronto's all-trans reference library. In our non-televised interview, Gray tells me more about it.

How did these books all come together? One of the philosophies that I brought into this was looking at *The Black Panther Party: Service To The People Programs* [by Huey P. Newton Foundation]. What [the Party] wanted was to set up programs for people in their communities by thinking of: 'what are the least amount of resources and time and commitment from people that we need to get this done?'

How do I look at what I've already got and do something close to a library, that people would be able to come and enjoy, and then see what happens next?

So, I put out the call. I think about 22 people donated. People came with little bins of everything.

We have over 300 zines and

books. It's a beautiful collection of all sorts of stuff, things I'd never seen before. Things that are really rare and largely just exist through PDFs or zine fairs.

Having a place to share things that come from people's personal libraries, we also get to see what trans and queer people in the community are actually reading. As opposed to just buying whatever newest top 10 book has 'trans' associated with it.

What are *you* reading right now? Right now I'm reading a lot of zines to add to the Toronto Zine Library catalog. A lot of people have been coming to me with trans zines.

One book that I'm dying to read is this [*A Safe Girl to Love* by Casey Plett], a series of short stories.

That's something Torrey Peters—who wrote *Stag Dance* and *Detransition, Baby*—she said the novella should be the new literary form for trans women. Because it's so accessible, financially, to be able to take time to write and then to be able to self-publish. It's the same idea as zines. Just write it and get it out there.

Has your experience in the art world informed how you curate the TLT?

Having a curatorial practice that's more community-based and artist-forward already, I was really able to reach out to the community in a way that felt authentic. It felt earned, if that makes sense. I've been trying to put work into my community, and they're giving it back.

That's the place where it really overlaps. The work part, less so the art [part].

What's special about coming into this space, vs buying/torrenting a book on your own? It has a sense of privacy. It is a space you can come into and know, 'well, they're hosting this collection, so obviously the people here aren't going to be upset that I come presenting however I do.' For a lot of people, that's a real barrier to accessing print literature.

But I've also seen people come in and share books with strangers, or bring a friend in and say, 'this is really similar to my experience.' A trans girl came in here with her boyfriend—it looked like they were kind of new—and this [*lex-icon: shitposting for t4t sex + romance*, a zine by

the collector's picks

1. object.type(3) by [unknown] "The person who donated put a question mark in the author [column] in the spreadsheet that I set up. I am desperate to figure out more about this book."

2. Food School by Jade Armstrong "The intersection of gender dysphoria and body dysmorphia is really complicated and really under-explored."

3. Vantage Points by Chase Joynt

4. Lyric Sexology Vol. 1 by Trish Salah "She's trying to communicate a lot with a limited form of poetry. I think she really succeeded."

5. A Short History of Trans Misogyny by Jules Gill-Peterson

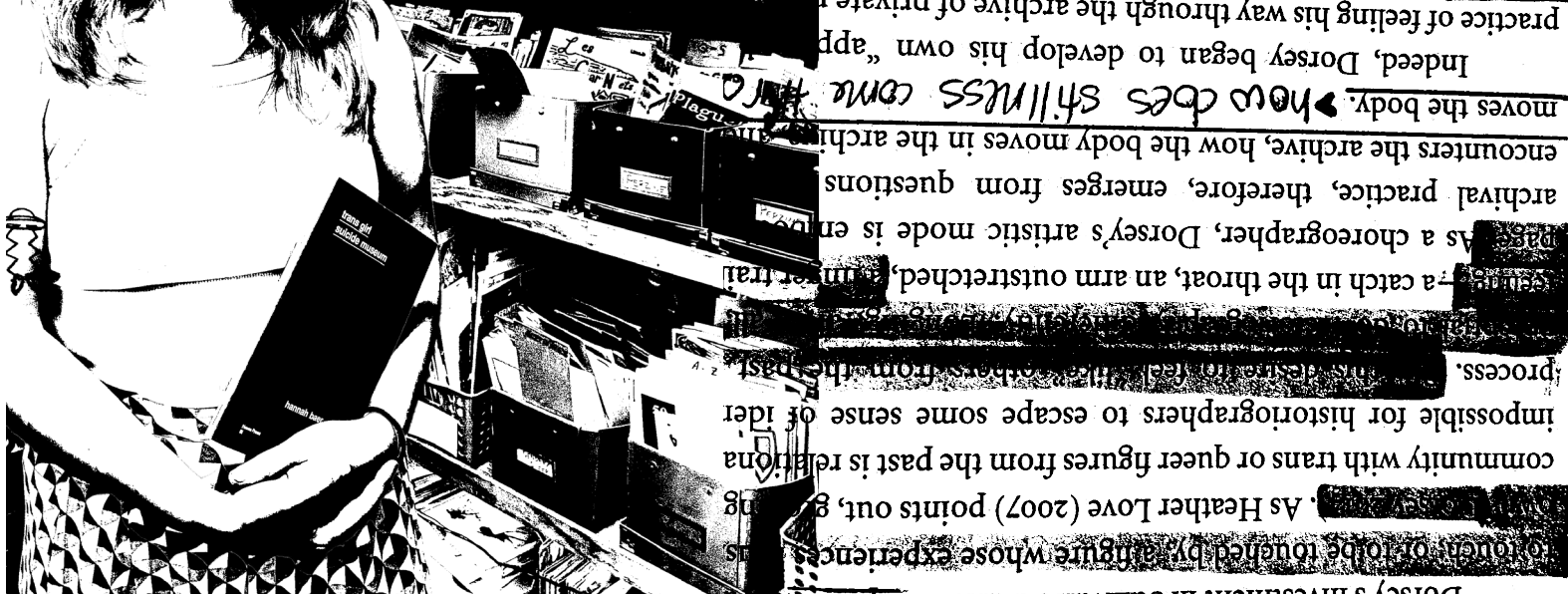
6. trans girl suicide museum by Hannah Baer

7. Nevada by Imogen Binnie

8. Time Is the Thing a Body Moves Through by T Fleischmann

9. On a Cute One by Frances Cordelia Beaver

10. Sex Goblin by Lauren Cook



Rosemary Campbell] was the one that they were looking through. They were showing things back and forth and giggling for an hour.

I wanted people to be able to come into the space, see something that they associate with and make them feel some kind of joy or excitement about being a trans person.

Being able to see yourself reflected like, 'oh, there's words for this thing I've experienced before.' We don't get that opportunity a lot.

What do you hope trans people take away from this space? My biggest want is for trans people to take away a sense of self, of, 'I've got this new scrap of a sentence that I read, I identify with it really closely, and I'm going to hold onto that.' Or, like that couple did, they could share with someone who may not know and be like, 'this is my experience.'

Having that little sense of wonder and then being able to leave with something to hold onto.

What about cis people? I want cis people to [be] able to look at how much we collected and how different all the books are. To challenge their preconceived notions of what trans literature can be. And to be able to show, like, we have books about Vince McMahon, but we also have books about recovering from top surgery.

The library can hold both and they can both be trans books.

What are your wildest dreams for the Library? Right now I'm not really sure what that looks like, but my wildest dream would be a standalone space that people can come into and enjoy, much like my comrades overseas at the Trans Library Helsinki.

I've been inspired by the type of programming they run, the collection they've managed to gather. It's something I can see being similarly taken up here if I were to have access to the space like that.

The Collectors

is a zine about things and their keepers. It is created by Jay Ashdown, a journalist and wannabe collector. Reach out on insta @jayjashdown

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Collector: McKenna Gray
Collection: Toronto Trans Library, Tranzac Club

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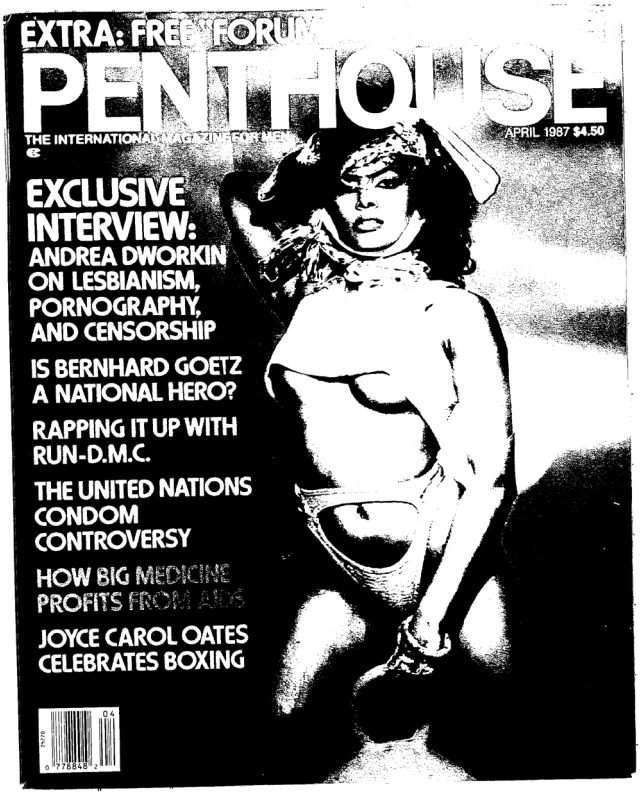
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